
Screening the Anthropocene in India: Climate, Forest and Indigenous Ecologies

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Abstract

Anthropocene, an epoch marked by considerable human intervention in the earth's geology and ecology, is seen in India as a result of a multifaceted relationship between post-colonial development and ecological catastrophe. Through this article, the author attempts to unfurl a literary tapestry, to delve into the realms of Rishab Shetty's *Kantara: A Legend* and Nila Madhab Panda's *Kadvi Hawa* as two separate but overlapping ecological films that map out the cartographies of environmental disaster in India and highlight the commonality between loss and resistance. Employing the concept of "slow violence" introduced by Rob Nixon and the concept of the Capitalocene, this article attempts to analyze the films in the context of environmental injustice discourse. While *Kadvi Hawa* is the depiction of slow violence as the effect of climate change, which is felt by desert ecosystems, poor populations, and postponed futures, *Kantara: A Legend* is a manifestation of immediate opposition to slow violence as the myths and ecologies of the indigenous population rebel against the aggressive power of capital and the state. Through a shared ecological lens, the two films can be seen as representing the spectrum of ecological experiences, encouraging us to understand that the subtle pain endured by marginalized groups and the bold declaration of their rightful place belong to the same narrative of the Capitalocene.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Capitalism, Conservation Capitalocene, Ecology, Environmental injustice, Indigenous population, Myth, Post-colonialism, Slow violence

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Introduction

The movie emerges as a potent socio-cultural instrument, having the capability of influencing and arousing the audience with the help of its vividly imaginative narrativity, well-structured dramatic speech, and complex interplay with the cognitive and affective capacities of the individual. However, the relationship between literature and film is intimate and vibrant because of the commitment of both literary forms to the process of storytelling through diverse methods of communication. Whereas literature, which relies on language, intimacy, and imagination, crafts its world of fiction using the technique of storytelling and symbolism, film adopts the spirit of storytelling and reinvents it using visual imagery and sound. . The problem, however, lies in the differentiation of the two, which stems from the fact that films are inspired by literature and develop into distinctive forms of narration through amplification, reduction, or reevaluation of their sources. Thus, one could conclude that film becomes a unique form of representation for literature. However, as a cultural form, movies attain a certain level of ability to communicate deep thoughts and ideas to the masses. This is especially true when we consider the way in which the movie has been able to effectively combine the visual aspects, dialogues, sounds, and symbols in a manner that is profound and effective. Whereas textual communication appeals purely to the intellect, movies communicate with both the intellect and the emotions, hence changing perspectives and attitudes, and even consciousness at times. This is due to the fact that movies are able to translate the abstract into reality.

The appearance of eco-films or 'eco-cinema' can only be discussed against the background of the epoch of the Anthropocene, a term coined by Eugene Stoermer and Paul Crutzen, characterized by an extraordinary effect of man on nature. With the growth of environmental problems, including climate change, deforestation, extinction of species, and depletion of resources, directors started to pay more attention to ecological stories in their films. The main purpose of eco-films is not just the depiction of nature, but rather the exploration of relations between people and nature that involve certain exploitation, imbalance, and opposition. Eco-cinema's primary objective lies in the cultivation of awareness and responsibility towards the environment. Through the visualization of the impact of the destruction of ecosystems and the inclusion of minority groups, mainly indigenous peoples and nonhuman characters. Eco-cinema subverts the anthropocentric viewpoint that prevails in society. The purpose of eco-cinema is not limited to representing the environment but operates as a site for critique, activism, and education that encourages a reevaluation of the connection between humans and nature. The importance of eco-films lies in the fact that they are able to provide a platform for environmental discussion because of the power of imagination of literary art, along with the realistic nature of cinematic art. "As Ghosh eloquently phrases it in the initial chapter of *The Great Derangement*, recognition unfolds as a transformative passage from ignorance to knowledge. It is time for us to acknowledge our actions and heed the compelling call to action". (Neethu and Bhuvanewari, 6).

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Through this article, the author attempts to unfurl a literary tapestry, to delve into the realms of Rishab Shetty's *Kantara: A Legend* and Nila Madhab Panda's *Kadvi Hawa* as two separate but overlapping ecological films, that map out the cartographies of environmental disaster in India and highlight the commonality between loss and resistance. Employing the concept of "slow violence" introduced by Rob Nixon—a form of violence that is neither instantaneous nor overt, but rather slowly and subtly, destroying human life and nature gradually—and the concept of the Capitalocene—as the name of our era which cannot be attributed to all humankind but to capitalism, and how it exploits resources for profit and creates environmental damage or according to Arons,

“Capitalocene” more accurately directs attention to the socioeconomic system that enabled the large-scale transformation of the earth through equally large-scale exploitation of “cheap” natural and human resources. (37)

This article attempts to analyze the films in the context of environmental injustice discourse. While *Kadvi Hawa* is the depiction of slow violence as the effect of climate change, which is felt by desert ecosystems, poor populations, and postponed futures, *Kantara: A Legend* is a manifestation of immediate opposition to slow violence as the myths and ecologies of the indigenous population rebel against the aggressive power of capital and the state. Through a shared ecological lens, the two films can be seen as representing the spectrum of ecological experiences, encouraging us to understand that the subtle pain endured by marginalized groups and the bold declaration of their rightful place belong to the same narrative of the Capitalocene.

Discussion

Human history is a complex weave of prudence and profligacy, marked by both sustainable stewardship and exhaustive exploitation of resources. When we delve into our past, we uncover a complex interplay of conservation, control, and confrontation that has shaped human interaction with the environment. Early civilisations, along with their religious and philosophical texts, reveal an unbroken and profound connection between humanity and its surroundings. This connection, however, began to fray with the arrival of colonial powers, whose rapid development efforts disrupted the delicate balance of ecosystems. The pace and nature of these changes were starkly different from the gradual transition from bullock carts to wheels that had previously characterized human progress.

Kantara emerges as an environmental palimpsest, in which the vibrant reality of nature is progressively obscured by the rational eye of state power, transforming the hallowed community of the landscape into its commodified property. The title “Kantara,” rooted in the idea of a “mysterious forest” or “dense jungle” in the local language, points to something other than mere geography. It is the forest that is not merely the backdrop to the drama; it is an animate force in its own right, a holy text that preserves the stories of indigenous symbiosis along with the marks of dispossession through attrition. The film is set in the forest-rich coastal strip of Dakshina

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Kannada, particularly in the village of Kambala in Kundapura, Karnataka. The story takes place amid the verdant settings of the Western Ghats, which feature a rich blend of forest, sacred grove, agriculture, and Bhoota Kola. The protagonist of *Kantara* is Kaadubettu Shiva (Rishab Shetty), a free-spirited young man from the village who has been immersed in the culture of the forest since his childhood. His village has a sacred connection to the forest god Panjurli Daiva, who protects it from all dangers. However, the main source of conflict comes from the actions of Murali (Kishore Kumar G), an upright forest officer, who aims to impose the authority of the government over the forest. On top of this, Devendra Suttooru (Achyuth Kumar), the village landlord, attempts to reclaim the land previously allotted to them by the government. Shiva initially shows no interest in getting involved but is eventually compelled to fight for his village and the faith they hold. Shiva ends up being the living embodiment of the god himself, thus asserting his identity.

From the perspective of Rob Nixon, it brings to light something that would otherwise remain hidden. The concept of slow violence proposed by Nixon, which entails violence that is slow, diffuse, and normalized, finds great resonance in the story. The presence of the forest department does not result in immediate violence, but rather in a slow process of authority that defines who belongs and who doesn't. In the words of one of the forest department officials, "This forest belongs to the government now" (*Kantara* 0:27:58-0:27:59). This is not just an assertion of power; it is an assertion of epistemic violence, which seeks to define natives as illegitimate settlers in the natural ecosystem that is their home. Moreover, the quiet but sharp words of Naga to his son—

Son, do you know where we humans go wrong? We tend to believe that everything we see around belongs to us. Forget the reality of the true owner of everything. The minute you realize this truth, you can lead a peaceful life. (*Kantara* 0:05:10–0:05:19)

turns out to be more than just personal wisdom. They act as an ethics that reflects the world of the Capitalocene era, along with its Slow Violence. This idea of property, at the root of which the illusion of human ownership lies, defines the core of the Capitalocene era, in which nature and humans become nothing but mere commodities. It allows for a form of violence to take place that operates gradually, invisibly. Thus, the wise words of Naga become a reflection upon the metaphysics of the *Chandogya Upanishad*. "Everything is Brahman," (Lokeswarananda, n.d., Verse 3.14.1). In this case, it becomes possible to recognize one's part in the process of destruction. It means that only when people understand their responsibility can there be an opportunity to restore the natural balance

In *Kantara*, the forest appears as a battleground over which state powers as well as the feudal system – acting at the behest of global capital – continue to attempt to govern (as well as commodify) the land's natural resources in the name of conservation. While both state law and

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capital operate using the language of legality, they also conceal the deeper underlying economic interests that are at work in transforming living ecosystems into standardized inputs for future exploitation. This battle is not just an ecological one; rather, it is an ontological battle between two different ways of viewing the world: one that enshrines the forest as sacred and another that views it simply as an asset to be used for accumulation.

The character of Shiva exemplifies this fracture between inherited ecological memory and the imposed systems of modernity. By his continuing, defiant restlessness against the constraints of both, Shiva ultimately creates a moment of visceral transformation during which he is liberated (body and land) from institutional authority and their claim to ownership over the forest through the performance of the sacred ritual of Bhoota Kola. While the film articulates that “the divine does not abandon those who protect the forest,” (*Kantara* 1:07:25-1:07:26), resistance is portrayed as something other than rebellion; it is about restoring the balance of the universe. Within this context, then, ritual functions as a form of ecological jurisprudence designed to challenge the linear temporal regime of capital through a cyclical and sacred form of time.

In the culmination of the vision of *Kantara*, where the possessed Shiva unites the hands of the forest officers as well as those of the native villagers, the episode takes the form of a brilliant metaphor for environmental justice in the context of the Capitalocene. Justice, in this instance, is achieved not via any legislation, policies, or legal proceedings, but through the spiritual re-establishment of relations: the forest ceases being the object that needs to be measured, appropriated, and owned, and becomes a subject of its own kind, which brings together all who are there within its bounds. Rather than obliterating any contradictions between different groups of people, the gesture made by the god compels them to realize their history of displacement, oppression, and violence towards one another. As such, the episode shows how the logic of capital is momentarily shaken off, giving way to a more ancient and profound way of understanding relations with other beings on Earth.

In this way, *Kantara* goes beyond its narrative, arising as an extremely strong Eco-Critical Working Document. The film not only shows the various forms of layered violence inherent within landscapes, but also reclaims the forest as a place of memory, divine force, and a source of resistance. As such, it urges us to rethink what ecological justice means and how violence has temporal depth; and that we must also resist capitalistic systems that continue to destroy both land & life.

With its stark minimalism, *Kadvi Hawa* reflects the barrenness of the landscape it depicts. The title of the film, “Kadvi Hawa” (“Bitter Wind”), is both descriptive and metaphoric. Wind is not simply an element of nature in passing; it carries with it the residue of history and an invisible, yet present, force of ecological degradation that winds its way through the land. The ‘bitter’ aspect of the wind represents more than just the harshness of weather; it represents the slow infiltration of pain, debt, and dispossession into the daily lives of the people living in this fragile

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terrain. So, the title refers to an ongoing condition of slow violence as defined by Rob Nixon rather than simply a single event. There is an instance from the film, where a young girl, whose mind stirred by a quiet wonder, turns to her family and asks, “Kitab mein char Mausam kyon likhe Hain... hamare yahan to sal mein do hi Mausam aate Hain” (*Kadvi Hawa* 00:27:38-00:28:01) In that simple yet profound question lies a gentle curiosity – an attempt to reconcile the world inscribed in books with the one she inhabits, where lived experience seems to diverge from written knowledge.

The framework that Nixon created helps to reveal how a slow violence stemming from a long-term drought caused by climate change has been caused over time through many small incidents rather than one moment, and this slow violence manifests itself in such a way that it can be difficult to depict using traditional narrative story structures. Through the imagery of the cracked earth, the dry air, and the villagers' isolation, we witness a type of violence that is a slow, constant, and gradual erosion of people's lives and dignity, rather than through a series of catastrophic and dramatic violent actions or events. The presence of the loan recovery agent expresses how the environmental disaster is connected to an economic disaster; therefore, the slow violence that happens as a result of the environmental degradation is not only ecological decline itself, but also the systems that take advantage of that degradation.

The Capitalocene perspective allows one to examine this connection at larger societal levels and the means by which a climate change event can be linked to a number of other global processes. *Kadvi Hawa* uses the storyline to show that climate change is not just a distant global phenomenon, but rather a global process characterised by environmental and industrial inequalities, and that the people who contribute the least amount of environmental destruction suffer the greatest consequences as a result of those actions.

The protagonists in this movie confront the challenge of existing underneath uncontrollable forces that govern their lives, often without their understanding. As a result, there is no direct resistance to any one issue presented in the narrative because of the exhausted state of existing within a system of slow violence. In fact, survival becomes the only real option for individuals when they have no ability to resist or oppose the conditions of their existence within the context of slow violence. However, the film does not simply portray its characters as passive victims of that context. There is a quiet strength and endurance among the individuals portrayed in the film through their ability to find some way to negotiate with their increasingly hostile environment.

The fact that *Kadvi Hawa* chooses not to create drama based on suffering thus creates a compelling reason for viewers to become part of the temporal structure of waiting for rain, relief, or future – all of which remain uncertain. This temporal structure creates a wonderful reflection of the nature of slow violence, where harm does not occur in a way that can easily be linked back to a cause or incident.

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In this sense, the film also highlights, via a critical, eco-approach, the nature of ongoing forms of violence as part of an ongoing, highly fluid system in which ecological crises result in disparities or inequalities along various class and geographical lines. Therefore, *Kadvi Hawa* ultimately stands as an incredible critique of the ongoing nature of ecological suffering and how we, as consumers, contribute to such suffering through the consumption and waste of goods. As such, the force of the wind also serves as a reminder, both materially and symbolically, of a world that has and continues to be damaged by ecological crises associated with the impact of the Capitalocene on the collective well-being of the community around the world.

Connecting these films back to the larger literary tradition, one might find parallels in the depiction of nature as a living entity in the work of Thomas Hardy. In *The Return of the Native*, Egdon Heath itself was not merely the backdrop, but a living and indifferent entity. Likewise, the drought in *Kadvi Hawa* is an omnipresent force. Still, while Hardy depicts a neutral landscape, the nature depicted in Indian Anthropocene cinema is scarred. In the former case, nature suffers at the hands of the industrialized world. In the latter, nature becomes an element of defiance to internal colonialism. One critical point to make about screening the two films would be the following idea: the Anthropocene era should rather be labeled as Capitalocene since the environmental problems are brought about by a specific form of capital, rather than humans as such. *Kadvi Hawa* portrays the inability of the global capital to consider the costs associated with carbon emissions. *Kantara* depicts the efforts of the government to disguise its colonial appropriation of native territories behind conservation rhetoric.

Conclusion

In summary, *Kadvi Hawa* and *Kantara: A Legend* mark an important paradigm shift in Indian film. Instead of exploiting nature as the setting for songs and dances, the filmmakers emphasize nature as the key component of their narrative. The inclusion of Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence, along with that of capitalocene, reveals that: in *Kadvi Hawa*, climate change is not something happening in the future, but it is the socio-economic condition of the present times, and in *Kantara*, indigenous wisdom and mythology are key elements to survival and resistance within the Anthropocene epoch.

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